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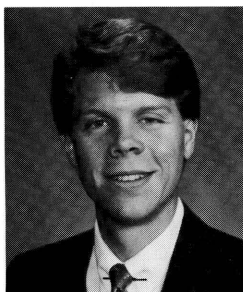
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# AN AMERICAN VIEW OF THE CANADIAN IDENTITY

*Scott B. Whittier*



## Introduction

Growing up twenty minutes from the Canadian border in suburban Buffalo, New York, I somehow felt that Canada was as native to me as downtown Buffalo. Sometimes my childhood friends and I would hike in the fields behind old Mr. Goetz's backyard, and after walking north for what seemed like hours, we would figure that "we must be in Canada by now."

Canada was a faraway place, a place where little boys could build a fort to call their own and spit and say darn 'cause Mom wasn't there and we made our own rules. But as I grew I learned that Canada wasn't in Goetz's fields, and even the bravest little boy hikers couldn't walk there.

The Canada of my youth was *not* a foreign country. Even as I learned how the city/state/country framework functioned, in my world Canada still seemed like Goetz's fields— not really ours, but kind of an unofficial extension that we could call ours. And Canadians were like Mr. Goetz himself—a neighbor you always

said "Hi" to, but never really knew anything about because you were too busy doing your own stuff.

My early opinion of Canada and Canadians is typical of Americans who know little of their neighbor to the North. If a watched kettle never boils, then Canada has been bubbling over for more than a century. Or, perhaps more correctly, American neglect of Canada and its people has created the environment in which Canada *could* boil—if the Canadian people ever found enough nerve and ambition to turn up the gas a bit. Canadians seem content to just simmer.

We Americans generally know very little about Canadians but think we do. We have always considered Canada an unchallenging and uninteresting neighbor, and for the most part Canadians have proved us right. Canadians have historically been discouraged with our disinterest in their country; but until their actions command our attention, they probably will never receive it.

The purpose of this article is to give the

Canadian people some attention. Surprisingly, Canada is quickly becoming less uninteresting and unchallenging. The word "surprisingly" will be used frequently through-out this text, as it is surprising how different our peoples really are.

## The Canadian Identity, Eh?

Journalist Brian Stock once noted that the two greatest threats to Canadian survival are the lack of a national identity and the ignorance of Canadian history and institutions in the United States (Stock, p. 586). American recognition of Canadian history and institutions requires that we perceive Canada as a distinct country with its own laws, customs and national character, not the 51st state or a country inhabited by "northern Americans."

The Canadian people's quest for a distinct national identity is as old as the nation itself. Canadians have anxiously tried to define who they are and what is truly Canadian, a search they feel is necessitated by our powerful and domineering presence.

Canadians feel they also need a defined identity and culture to which Canadians from every province can cling: an identity that will allow Canadians as a people to remain afloat in the face of the waves of American television, movies, literature and other influences that crash across the border every day. A Canadian reads newspapers filled with articles from American press wires, watches American news and prime-time programs, and goes to American movies. American viewpoints and culture converge on the Canadian daily, and if too prevalent the Canadian may begin to think like an American.

But most Americans feel that Canadians are guilty of being just like Americans anyway, so what's the big deal? The big deal is that Canadians do not want to be Americans or considered as equivalent. So, before we Americans find Canadians guilty of being "just like us," maybe we should hear their side of the story.

When we listen to the Canadian people's story, we hear how their history, geography, climate, politics and economics have shaped them into a unique people, just as our unique

circumstances have molded us into Americans. We learn that their nation, historically taken for granted, is not content with its doormat status but unsure how to create a new image. And we find, surprisingly, that their view of the world is indeed unique and distinctly different from ours.

As an introduction to the Canadian point of view, consider the following comments by Canadians concerning diverse subjects ranging from early British control of North America to the Babe himself:

- Northrop Frye, noted Canadian scholar: "American students have been conditioned from infancy to think of themselves as citizens of one of the world's greatest powers; Canadians are conditioned from infancy to think of themselves as citizens of a country of uncertain identity, a confusing past and a hazardous future" (Frye, p. B4).
- Author Peter C. Newman: "You can tell a Canadian by the fact that when he walks into a room, he automatically chooses to sit in the most uncomfortable chair. It's part of our genetic affinity for discomfort and self-denial" (Newman, p. 7).
- Newman, again: "The quintessential Canadian hero may have been Mackenzie King, who ruled this country longer than any other man, enjoyed the sex life of a gnat, never took a political chance and was so fastidious that, on a 1949 visit to his good friend John D. Rockefeller, he brought along six spare shoelaces" (Newman, p. 7).
- Historian and author Pierre Berton, speaking to an American: "Our history can be said to lack passion. That may be one reason why we do not wear our emotions on our sleeves as you do. Our ancestors . . . lacked the opportunity and, let's face it, the passionate desire to rebel (against the British)" (Berton, p. 45).
- Mordecai Richler, noted author of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* and outspoken critic of Canadian nationalism:

"Canadians not only expect but welcome failure. We have a gift for plucking defeat out of the jaws of victory. If, for instance, Babe Ruth had been Canadian rather than American, he would not be remembered as the Sultan of Swat, the giant who hit 714 home runs during his legendary career. Instead he would be mourned as yet another inadequate Canadian, a flunk who struck out an embarrassing 1,330 times" ("A Lost Cause," p. 16).

- Richler, again: "Elsewhere—that's the operative word. The built-in insult. Canadians, my generation, sprung to adolescence during World War II, were conditioned to believe the world happened elsewhere. You apprenticed for it in Canada, on the farm with a view, and then you lit out for the golden cities: New York, London, Paris. . . . The Canadian kid who wanted to be prime minister wasn't thinking big, he was setting a limit to his ambitions rather early" (Richler, p. 142).
- Pierre Berton, again: "Our identity has been shaped by our negative reaction to your overpowering presence. We know who we are *not*, even if we aren't quite sure who we are. We are not American" (Berton, p. 58).
- And finally from *Maclean's* magazine (the Canadian counterpart of *Newsweek*), which ran a contest a few years ago in an attempt to help define the Canadian identity, asking readers to complete the sentence, "As Canadian as . . ." The winning entry: "As Canadian as possible under the circumstances."

If you want to see what an angry Canadian looks like, walk up to one and say, "Boy, you Canadians are just like us Americans!" Former *New York Times* Toronto Bureau Chief Andrew Malcolm discovered, "Americans usually seek to see superficially what is the same between them and Canadians, while Canadians usually look, the easy way, only for what is different and wrong and, hopefully, both" (Malcolm, p. xiii). Canadians don't want to be Americans and

resent the fact that we don't care enough about them to learn that they aren't.

And we don't care, do we? Not because we're conceited, but simply because we have more important concerns. Canadians' most important concern outside their border is the mighty U.S., so they are always up to date on U.S. affairs. Very few of us could name the Canadian prime minister's wife; but Canadians not only could name Reagan's Nancy, but could probably outdo most of us and name George Bush's wife.

Why are Canadians not like us? They're different because our two countries and peoples have matured under different circumstances. You will find the sources of our differences in Canadian history, geography and climate, economic position and the Great American Presence. Examining each in turn will give us a better understanding and appreciation for the Canadian people.

## Of Mounties And Men

### Explorer Men

In 1535, French sailor Jacques Cartier sailed up the river he later named St. Lawrence in search of the fabled Northwest Passage, the route to the Orient. Legend has it that he went ashore at what is now Quebec City to ask some Indians where he was. The Indians, probably thinking Cartier was asking what they called their village, replied, "Kanata," their word for "a settlement." Thus, the country founded on the way to somewhere else and named as a result of a bilingual misunderstanding was dubbed Canada (Malcolm, pp. 62–3).

### Colonist Men

The American Revolutionary period was a period of divergence in North America. A study of this period will show how the once similar North Americans became distinctly Canadian and American. Prior to the American Revolution, a North American observer did not see two distinct people separated by the American-Canadian border. The colonists on either side were similar in many ways, just living under different circumstances. Most colonists (with the notable exception of Quebec's French Ca-

nadians) were British, having themselves sailed to North America looking for opportunity or having parents or grandparents with the same dreams of success.

But although the personalities of the American and Canadian colonists were somewhat similar, their economic circumstances were not. Colonists in Canada were fewer in number and economically more dependent on the British than were their southern counterparts. In the Thirteen Colonies, meanwhile, the colonists found themselves virtually self-sufficient economically and fed up with the British. The time for revolution was at hand.

### **Travelin' Men**

When Patrick Henry cried, "Give me liberty, or give me death," about one-third of the American colonists wanted nothing to do with either—especially if the two somehow were related. These people, thereafter called "Loyalists" due to their loyalty to the British monarch, expressed their loyalty in two ways: by immediately traveling North to settle in British ruled Canada, or by remaining in America in hopes of a British victory, and then also settling in Canada after the defeat.

Fifty thousand Loyalists settled in British North America after the Revolution, nearly doubling Canada's population. This wave of immigration gave birth to the provinces of New Brunswick and Ontario, joining the established provinces of Quebec and Nova Scotia. A new era in Canada had begun.

Canada did not just offer continued British rule, it offered free land and low taxes; Canada was also a land of opportunity. Yet despite these benefits, British Loyalists and other former Americans came "simply because Canada was less awful than where they were, a key conditioner to Canada's generally conservative personality that puzzles its friends. As Scott Symons, the Canadian novelist, once wrote, 'Canadians are, after all, simply romantics who lost the courage of their hopes'" (Malcolm, p. 65).

### **Different Men**

After the Revolution, the collective personalities on both sides of the border were no

longer as similar as they once had been. A divergence of Canadian and American identities had occurred. This divergence could be seen in the actions and emotions of the two peoples in post-Revolution North America.

On the American side, the former colonists celebrated their victory and the birth of their nation; their Canadian counterparts mourned the British loss and the fragmented collection of provinces they called home. The Americans relished the future challenges they would face in constructing their own government; the Canadians clung to the past and the security that British rule offered them. The Americans rebelled against the mighty British and showed their distrust of strong government through their Constitution's series of checks and balances; the Canadians liked strong government, especially strong *British* government.

### **American Men**

An American might look at the history and the personalities of the two peoples and conclude that the American Revolution served to separate the men from the boys—the boys pulled up to Canada by the Queen's apron strings. That view may be correct, albeit prejudiced. A more accurate account may be that the Revolution effectively separated the risk takers from the risk averse.

We Americans have always glorified the risk taker, the guy who starts with nothing, takes some chances and ends up on top. The traditional American mythology glorifies the gunfighter and the adventurer—the free-spirit willing to oppose society and its rules to do what is right. From Davy Crockett to Huck Finn to Abe Lincoln, our country's heroes may not have always understood the difference between legal and illegal, but they always knew the difference between right and wrong. But that is to be expected. After all, breaking what we felt were unjust British laws gave birth to our nation.

### **Mounties**

But our Canadian friends do not share our mythology and our heroes. Canada became a nation legally through a bill passed in British

Parliament—through cooperation, compromise and patience, not revolution. Therefore, their heroes reflect these virtues. Their West was not won and ruled by the gun-slingin', tobacco-spittin' mavericks that John Wayne spent his career portraying, but by the immaculately dressed army of father figures known as the Mounties.

Due to our distrust of authority figures, the American lawman of the West was a symbol of our country's rugged individualism. He was a most atypical defender of the peace, often shooting first and asking questions later. The Mountie, however, was Canada's symbol of the law and order that Canadians cherish as much as we our individualism. The most potent weapon a Mountie used was not his gun; he rarely if ever was forced to use it, contrary to the fashion in which Hollywood portrayed him. Rather, the only weapon the Mountie needed was the Canadian people's deference to and respect for their chief symbol of law and order. (Hand over the gun? Yes, sir.) In fact, as historian Pierre Berton points out, the Mounties were created "not to save the white men from the wild Indians, but to save the Indians from the wild white men. (And) these wild men were mostly Americans" (Berton, p. 29).

Thus, our two histories are quite different and, therefore, so are the descendents of the historical players. But Canada is a nation ruled by the land as much as it is ruled by the people. Geography has been, and will always be, a prime determinant of the Canadian people's personality.

## **It's Not *That* Cold (If You Don't Go Outside)**

### **Geography**

Canada is often said to be more geography than nation. Canada is the second largest nation in the world in terms of area, larger than its southern neighbor, but with only one-tenth its population. While one might view the great Japanese population and the tiny islands they call home and wonder, "Where do you put all those people?", for Canada the question might be, "Aren't you guys lonely?"

But loneliness is not a great concern since most Canadian homes are concentrated in the one-hundred-mile-wide strip of land lying atop our northern border. Canadians reside in southern Canada for various reasons, primarily because the harsh northern climate pushes them to the warmer South. The large amount of Canadian-American trade makes living near the border economically more feasible, too.

Canadian communities are in a sense "lonely" as they are spread out into little clusters throughout the country. From east to west, Canadians are divided from each other by geography: the sea separates the Maritime provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island from Newfoundland; Maine splits the Maritimes from Quebec; the uninhabitable Precambrian Shield of northern Ontario divides Quebec and Ontario from the Prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta; the beautiful Canadian Rockies remove British Columbia from the Prairies and the rest of Canada; and finally, climate more so than geography separates the frigid Yukon and Northwest territories from all of Canada.

Canadian scholar and literary critic Northrop Frye noted, "Everywhere in Canada we find solitudes touching solitudes; every part of Canada has strong separatist feelings, because every part of it is in fact a separation" (Frye, p. B1). One can understand why Canadians find it hard to unite as a people; Canadians are more separated from each other than from Americans living just south of them.

This separation carries over into national unity and culture. The "Hands Across America" hype that dominated our media in the summer of 1986 shows how in one way geography has hindered Canadian unity. Despite many holes in the chain of hands that joined to fight hunger and homelessness in our country, the idea that a New Yorker could, through the hands of millions of others, be connected to a Californian somehow made our country seem smaller and more united.

Such an undertaking would be preposterous in Canada. Geography dispels any romantic notions of trans-Canada handholding. The chain would have more holes than chain, making Canada seem even larger and Canadi-



ans less united. Yet the idea of somehow uniting Canadians despite the formidable barriers has captured the collective imagination of the people since Canada's birth. Born along with Canada was a plan for a transcontinental railroad, a means to improve communications between the opposite ends of the country. The railroad, however, resulted in more problems and disappointments than communication.

More recently, Terry Fox, a 22-year-old Canadian cancer victim, became a national hero and a unifying symbol for all Canadians as he attempted to conquer both Canada's geography and his own inner demons by "Fox-trotting" from coast to coast. Cancer ended Terry's Run for Hope some 3,339 miles later, and a nation mourned the loss of a hero and, perhaps, the loss of their dream: the dream that despite obstacles human effort alone could unite Canada.

The humbling presence of Canada's often insurmountable climate and geography has conditioned Canadians to believe that oftentimes human effort alone doesn't make a damn difference. Americans have been taught to believe just the opposite.

As Andrew Malcolm observed, "If their frontier-taming experience convinced Americans that anything was possible, the geography of Canada taught its captives true skepticism, that everything, especially themselves, has its limits" (Malcolm, pp. 6-7). This pervasive fatalism in Canadian thinking further clarifies why Canadians have historically considered themselves second-rate, touching all aspects of Canadian life, especially the national personality.

## Climate

Climate as well as geography seems to shape a people by setting their inner thermostat. Think of Italians, Greeks, and other Mediterranean peoples; think of Latin Americans, Californians and Hawaiians. They sing and celebrate in the streets, love and laugh openly. Their warm environment seems to bring out the warmth in them, the passions and emotions. Cold weather people, however, like Scandinavians, Russians, Minnesotans and Mainers are more reserved, friendly but not passionately

so, keeping emotions under wraps (Berton, p. 85).

The lifestyles of the two types of people seem to dictate that they have different personalities. Scantily-clad hot-weather people congregate on beaches, in outdoor cafes, living among the masses out of doors. Cold weather people are an indoor people, hiding underlayers of clothing, huddling next to the fire with family and perhaps a few close friends. Canadian Pierre Berton, reflecting on the Canadian climate commented:

Our wintry reserve cools our human enthusiasms.... We do not make friends as easily as you (Americans) do, perhaps from a fear of being too forward. As my daughter's well-traveled Swiss landlady once remarked, she could always tell a Canadian from an American "because an American acts as if he is at home wherever he goes; a Canadian always acts as a guest" (Berton, p. 86).

As a Buffalonian, I see in myself how unpredictable and often debilitating weather has made me a more flexible and adaptable person—perhaps too flexible and adaptable. All the years of snowed-in cars and changing plans due to poor weather has taught me to just deal with problems instead of dwelling on them. But like the aforementioned fatalistic Canadian mentality, the "why try to change the unchangeable" attitude is often applied to problems that could be changed instead of just dealt with. For better or worse, Northerners seem to be a more patient people.

Andrew Malcolm, referring to the patience exhibited in Canada, remarked, "Nobody honked or yelled there. Canadians, it seemed, were always waiting for the bus; it'll be along. Americans always looked for it; where the hell is it?" (Malcolm, p. 321). The same may be said for our two attitudes toward independence: Americans asked the British, "Where the hell is it?", finally running out of patience. Canadians waited in the knowledge that someday it would be along.

So far this paper has shown how historical, geographic and climatic differences have led our two nations down different paths: our individualism versus their law and order; our

country born through our impatience with taxation without representation versus their willingness to abide by British laws until independence was appropriate for both parties; our hospitable land of opportunity versus their land of geographic barriers; and our sunny beaches versus their frozen tundras.

Two sets of unique and often opposite national circumstances have bred two distinct national characters: characters that sometimes appear similar, but at other times appear vastly different. These differences carry over into the world of business.

### **Trade, Investment and More Identity Doubts**

Two issues have dominated Canadian-American business relations for decades: trade and foreign investment. Today free trade is the big issue, but in Canada talk of freer trade induces worries of harm to the Canadian identity. Many believe that maintaining a distinct national identity and culture requires limiting American "imports" in the communications and cultural industries. Canadians reason that if all the demand for culture were supplied by Americans who can produce it more cheaply, Canadian culture, and hence the Canadian identity, might cease to exist. So limiting the inflow of American culture leaves room for Canadians to produce Canadian culture profitably.

A recent national survey reflected how the economic issue of free trade is a cultural one as well in Canada. Instead of asking those polled whether they approve of freer U.S.-Canadian trade, pollsters asked if freer trade would harm the Canadian identity. If a poll were taken in the U.S. concerning the lifting of quotas on Japanese imports, respondents would mention worries of lost jobs and a worsened trade balance, not lost culture. In Canada free trade worries involve both cultural and economic aspects.

Foreign investment induces similar worries. Canadians again fear too much foreign control within their borders, especially American control. But like free trade, foreign investment has cultural and identity overtones.

Canadians don't want their best and brightest working for American companies.

Today the Mulroney government welcomes foreign (especially American) investment, mainly to compensate for Canada's otherwise sluggish economy. But in the early 1970s, Canadians worried about the high levels of foreign ownership in certain key sectors. The Foreign Investment Review Agency was created by the Trudeau government to screen and to effectively reduce foreign investment in Canada. The 5,524.5-mile-long investment welcome mat that Canadians had historically laid on the U.S.-Canadian border was rolled up and stored away.

The conclusion one reaches after examining the Canadian personality and how it affects business is this: economic issues such as free trade and foreign investment are not just economic issues in Canada. Government regulation in these areas often has little to do with economics, but much to do with identity worries.

### **The Great American Presence**

As Americans, we have trouble imagining how the Great American Presence has shaped the Canadian personality. We've never really been in the shadow of any other country except England, since we are large and powerful, and the few other powerful nations lie on the other side of the globe.

Pierre Trudeau once said that "Living next to the U.S. is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt." Trudeau was referring mainly to political and economic grunts, but we have influenced the Canadian personality as well.

Canadians are like the little kid whose older brother is a football star, straight A student, and loved by everyone in town. They're like the kid whose definition of success is rising out of his brother's shadow and becoming just as great as his brother—simply an impossible goal. He's not content with just becoming the best person he can. Like the little kid, Canadians have grown discouraged with their



inability to keep up with the United States' great footsteps, never appreciating the smaller footprints they stamp on their own.

## The Birth Of Canadian Pride

But what happens if that older brother falls from grace? The little brother who for years thought of himself as second rate re-evaluates himself. His ways of doing things now seem more correct, not backward as they did in the past. His self-confidence and pride soar. Second or third or fourth place no longer is considered a victory.

In the eyes of Canadians, America has fallen from grace. The blunders of Vietnam, Watergate, and the Iranian hostage crisis gave Canadians cause to reassess their own self-worth. Perhaps in the long run, patience, compromise, and cooperation is better than American aggressiveness. And maybe Canada isn't a second rate nation after all.

Older Canadians grew up during the American glory years — with American accomplishment after achievement after victory ringing in the background. Younger Canadians are less star-struck by Americans. Growing up during Vietnam and Watergate made them proud to be Canadians and glad not to be Americans. They're in no rush to pack their bags and head south as previous generations were. "For today's generations of maturing Canadians, such thoughts seem increasingly strange" (Malcolm, p. 147).

This generation of Canadians looks to win. In the most physical form of competition, athletics, Canadians are emerging as tough competitors. Canadian downhill skiers, dubbed the Kamikazi Kids for their reckless, go-for-it attitude, became a force on the World Cup Ski circuit a few years ago. Toronto's Ben Johnson is currently considered the world's fastest man after beating Carl Lewis regularly in 1986. Also, in 1986 Saskatchewan's Rueben Mayes was named the NFL Rookie of the Year. As the list goes on, Canadian pride increases. Andrew Malcolm notes this competitive change in saying, "For a long while tough, really tough competition was not an integral part of (Canadian) life. . . . (Today) spirits are rising along

with the demand for excellence and the attempts for it" (Malcolm, p. 128).

As Canadian athletes' competitiveness has increased, so has that of their fans. In the late 1970s when the Toronto Blue Jays were still a young franchise, some American Blue Jay players complained of their fans' politeness; they would applaud when a player from *either* team got a hit. Today, though still polite, Toronto fans can yell obscenities at the opponent as well as can any fans outside New York City.

All Canadians really needed was someone or something to tell them that they weren't second rate. As former Canadian Davis Cup player Pierre La Marche remarked, "I just wish someone had told me that it was o.k. to think I could be the greatest — not just in Canada, but in the world" (Rennick, p. 4A). More and more Canadians are beginning to think that way.

The reasons for this emergence of Canadian pride are hard to pinpoint. One cause may be the developments of television and central heating. Younger Canadians did not grow up huddling next to the fire, listening to Grandpa's tales of taming the wilderness. Instead they watched American programs which necessarily exposed them to the American virtues of competitiveness and self-confidence. And national television also brought Canadians closer together, providing a needed feeling of unity. Vancouver doesn't seem as foreign to Torontonians as it once did.

A sense of pride does seem to be emerging in Canada. As this pride grows, the competitive spirit will spread into all facets of Canadian life. Industrial competitiveness will increase. Aggressiveness in negotiations will also increase. And Canadians will more fully appreciate what being Canadian is all about.

We have now examined the primary determinants in the formation of the Canadian identity: history, geography and climate, business and the Great American Presence. However, to fully understand the Canadian identity and how it is changing, a quick study of the culture that this identity produces is necessary.

## Canadian Popular Culture

The most important culture to study in

order to discover the true nature of Canadian thought is not the culture one finds in art galleries and in critically acclaimed literature. Instead it is *popular* Canadian culture that reveals how the average Canadian thinks. The movies he sees, the comedy she laughs at, and the books they both buy contain their values and reflect the national mood.

### Literature

In the 1970s, with Canadian worries of controlling American foreign investment at the forefront of popular and political discussion, the political novels of Richard Rohmer became best sellers. In *Ultimatum*, written in 1973, the Great American threat becomes a reality as the U.S. gives Canada 48 hours to give up its natural gas supply or be annexed. Canada refuses, and in the next novel (1974's *Exxoneration*) the U.S. attacks, but Canada triumphs. "The defeat results from a mixture of Canadian shrewdness and American arrogance — an arrogance that is betrayed by the Americans' knowing virtually nothing about the country they try to invade" (Irvine, p. 102). By turning the historic American ignorance of Canada that Canadians despise so much into the key for victory, Rohmer gives Canadians a chance to say "Serves you Americans right!"

### Comedy

While Canadian literature's uniqueness is expected, Canadian films and even comedy are unique, too. Though we laugh indiscriminately at both American and Canadian comedians, differences in American and Canadian humor do exist. Canadian comedies and comedians tend to rely more on self-deprecating humor than their American counterparts.

Geoff Pevere, a Canadian film critic, finds that American humor in the 1980s "epitomized by 'Ghostbusters', white middle-class teen comedies, David Letterman's television show, Eddie Murphy and Joan Rivers . . . is television insult humor that reinforces the normality, correctness and superiority of the central character or comedian at the expense (of others)" (Pevere, p. 42). Canadian humor is based more upon satire and the insecurities and shortcomings of the comedian himself. It then is no sur-

prise that "Saturday Night Live," a satirical show that forces Americans to laugh at themselves and their vices, has been dominated by Canadian talent including Dan Aykroyd, John Candy, Dave Thomas, Rick Moranis and Martin Short.

Although we Americans might react defensively to Pevere's accusations, our movies and humor do seem filled with mockery of others and racism in the guise of stereotyping. But our type of humor may be unavoidable in our society. Our competitive nature may force us to adopt this "cut-down" brand of humor.

Canadians, however, live in a less competitive environment and often are insecure as a nation. Their self-deprecating humor, then, is expected, too. They deal with their believed shortcomings by good-naturedly poking fun at themselves. Even the design of the Canadian flag may be a result of Canadian humor. On the Canadian flag is pictured a red maple leaf on a white background. If one concentrates and sees the white as the *foreground* and the red leaf as the *background*, the image one sees is of two men arguing. While this may be accidental, the flag was designed in the late 1960s when the frequency of arguments between French and English Canadians was increasing. Perhaps the designers thought it would be funny if the flag represented in an abstract way the historical bickering between the French and English. So the Canadian flag, THE unifying symbol for all Canadians, rather humorously recognizes their greatest obstacle to national unity: French-English bickering.

### Film

At the movies, the Canadian film industry is just beginning to achieve some commercial successes. Canadian film-makers long have been praised for their success in documentaries, but not dramas. Canadians seem much more comfortable with the factual material of documentaries than with the fantasy of fiction. Given the Canadian people's penchant for order and our longing for adventure, one would expect Canadians to produce documentaries successfully, while American cinema specializes in fantasy. But as Canadians have become more confident as a nation in the past few years,

Canadians have boldly moved into fiction.

Canadians' obsession with the American presence has always been a major theme in Canadian film. But in the past few years, with Canadian pride on the rise, the American presence has been treated with less reverence and more scorn. Sandy Wilson's "My American Cousin," one of 1985's most popular and critically acclaimed Canadian movies, captures this change in the Canadian adoration of Americans and our culture. It does so through its central character, Sandy, a representative of the Canadian people and a thirteen-year-old girl in the prime of her adolescence. Sandy is infatuated with her visiting American cousin Butch, a remarkable James Dean look-alike. She feels imprisoned on the ranch where she lives—it has a big gate that makes it seem like a prison. She hopes that Butch will take her away from it all, as many Canadians in the past yearned to "escape" from Canada and succeed in the States. Butch shows Sandy what life outside the ranch's gate can be like—fast cars and rock & roll—but in the process, in true 1980s fashion, she learns what a creep Butch can be. In the narrative that ends the movie, Sandy reaches some conclusions about her obsession with Butch and his world (paralleling Canadians' obsession with Americans and the U.S.): "I was in such a hurry to get off the ranch (i.e., to leave Canada). Then when my father sold it, I missed it more than I would have ever thought possible."

Sandy's revelations mirror Canadian thought in 1985 and today, as Canadians are now more content to stay "on the ranch," more content to be Canadians. Sandy's coming-of-age "parallels a larger cultural consciousness

raising in Canada: Canada's own coming-of-age" (Fox, p.34).

## Conclusion

The Canadians we have regarded for so long as "just like us" are indeed a distinct people with their own character, culture and ideas. Their history, climate and our domineering presence have made them in many ways self-conscious as a nation. Canadians historically have been like "My American Cousin's" Sandy, a gangly adolescent who is sure that everybody is prettier and smarter than she is.

But everyone grows up sooner or later, and Canada's day may have arrived. The current rise in Canadian pride and athletic competitiveness is sure to spread to other facets of life, including industry and maybe even government. Canadian government officials have historically tried to appease Americans, but those days may end. Canadians do relish their close friendship with us; but if we continue to take them for granted, they may not be as friendly as they have been.

Maybe all the Canadian people need to assert themselves is something to push them over the edge. The issue of acid rain could do it. Canadians may someday be forced to act against us in order to save their lakes and forests. Further American trade restrictions on Canadian products could push them over the edge, too. Trade restrictions could force Canadians to stand up in self-defense, and today they may be able to do so effectively.

Or maybe, just maybe, if the Blue Jays won the World Series?! Canada would never be the same, eh?

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